

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

**FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING USER
INTERFACES FOR WEB APPLICATION PROGRAMS**

Field of the Invention

[001] The present invention relates to a framework for creating user interfaces for application programs, such as web application programs.

Background Information

[002] User Interface or UI programs enable interaction between users and application programs running on computers. There is a wide variety of user interfaces with different approaches in interaction and design.

[003] Modern business applications are usually web based and typically a web browser is used to display and enable one or more web pages utilizing a user interface.

[004] For business applications, web pages can be seen as the union of business data and user interface layout settings. The business data are retrieved for every application from one or more backend systems. There may be different backend systems for different applications, like Supply Chain Management (SCM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Financials (FI), etc. The business data are organized in the web page according to the user interface layout settings.

[005] For web pages with dynamic screen content, a server side scripting language is commonly used. The server side scripting language may include, but is not limited to, Java Server Pages (JSP), Active Server Pages (ASP) and/or Business Server Pages (BSP). However, the straightforward use of a server side scripting language will typically result in a solution that fits only the application it was originally

intended for, because there is no standard way of treating the user interface layout and the specialized tags provided by a reusable tag library.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[006] It is an object of the invention to provide an additional abstraction to achieve standardization of a user interface layout and merging it with business data.

[007] In accordance with an embodiment of the invention, a framework is provided for generating a user interface for an application program, such as a web application program. The web application program may have numerous web pages that are displayed by means of a web browser receiving, for example, hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) responses from a web server. The framework may provide a first set of database tables to define user interface screens including tables that may describe components, screen layout, component configuration, application model assignment, and/or event handling. The framework may further provide a first set of transactions for maintaining the first set of database tables, and may provide HTTP response means for generating the web pages by accessing the first set of database tables.

[008] One or more embodiments of the invention may utilize components to define a reusable screen pattern, which can in turn be utilized to generate a user interface.

[009] One or more embodiments of the invention may also utilize a second set of database tables based upon the first set of database tables. The second set of database tables may be used for customization and personalization of the user interface.

[0010] As further disclosed herein, embodiments of the invention are also directed to a system for generating a user interface of a web application program. The system may comprise: a repository of reusable screen components; means for enabling a user to create a web page layout by selecting components from the repository, arranging selected components within the web page, defining interaction between screen components, and defining interaction between screen components and the web application program; and means for storing rendering information of the web page layout to enable the web server to render of the web page.

[0011] In one or more embodiments, the repository of reusable screen components may include a tray component, a tab-strip component, a tool-bar component, a text area component, a form-box component, a selection-box component, a table-view component, a table-view-for-time-series component, and/or a chart component. Further, the means for storing the rendering information may include means for storing a layout settings of the selected components, properties of the selected components, and/or the handling of data represented by the selected components.

[0012] Additionally, or alternatively, the means for storing rendering information include data storage means to store variables defining the web page layout. Moreover, in one or more embodiments, the system may further comprise means for retrieving the stored rendering information and generating hypertext mark-up language (HTML) code using the rendering information.

[0013] Other embodiments and features are possible. For example, the means for storing rendering information may include data storage means for storing variables defining event handlers assigned to the reusable components. Further, the means for storing rendering information may include data storage means for storing

variables defining an application model assignment of the data presented by the reusable components.

[0014] Embodiments of the invention are further directed to a computer readable medium and a computer program comprising instructions for generating a user interface according to the methods and features described herein.

[0015] Additional objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

[0016] It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention, as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate several embodiments of the invention and together with the description, explain the principles of the invention. In the drawings:

[0018] Figure 1 is an overview diagram of an exemplary system with a user interface;

[0019] Figure 2 illustrates an exemplary architecture of a user interface;

[0020] Figure 3 schematically illustrates an exemplary composition of a user interface;

[0021] Figure 4 illustrates a screen shot of an exemplary transaction defining screen layout;

[0022] Figure 5 illustrates a screen shot of an exemplary transaction defining method in specialized classes; and

[0023] Figure 6 is a class diagram of an exemplary UI framework.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0024] Reference will now be made in detail to embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings and described herein. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts. The exemplary embodiments disclosed herein are intended for purposes of illustration and should not be construed to limit the invention in any manner.

[0025] Embodiments of the invention may be implemented in computer systems or networks. By way of example, Figure 1 illustrates an exemplary system 1 including a server device 2 and client devices 3a-3c (generally "client devices 3") connected by a network 4. The network 4 may comprise a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), an intranet, the Internet, and/or any other network. A user interface program 5 allows users to receive information from and input information into the server device 2. Client devices 3 may include Internet browser programs to display the user interface screens and to enable the user to enter input.

[0026] An organization may implement the system 1 of Figure 1 to handle data management in some or all of the organization's business activities. This includes, but is not limited to, applications such as Supply Chain Management (SCM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Financials (FI), etc.

[0027] Figure 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary user-interface-architecture 10, consistent with an embodiment of the invention. The architecture 10

may be used to implement the user interface program 5. It may comprise a Model-View-Controller paradigm, a strategy in object oriented programming for separating the presentation of data (VIEW) 11 from the data maintenance (MODEL) 12 and the application flow control (CONTROLLER) 13. The model 12 is the representation of the logical structure of data in the application, the view 11 includes logic for generating web pages and the controller 13 consists of all object classes for communicating between model 12 and view 11. The controller 13 may include a page-rendering controller 14 to provide page-rendering information to the view 11, and a page data controller 15 for modifying the data stored in the model 12 according to the input, which may be provided by the user.

[0028] Referring now to Figure 3, the composition of an exemplary user interface (UI) is described. Consistent with an embodiment of the invention, a user interface framework may be provided that introduces standardization to the process of creating user interfaces for web applications in order to achieve code reusability. The raw model used for the screen layout may be based on the assumption that a web application 20 is made up of a navigation menu (or feature menu) 21, any given number of screen-frames 22 and/or any given number of graphical user interface (GUI) components 23-27 contained in the screen-frames 22. The GUI components 23-27 may include any required number of different components 26-27 that may be configured to display business data and/or any other type of data.

[0029] In one embodiment, the user interface framework provides all the components required to set up a screen layout. The components may include a tray component, a tab-strip component, a toolbar component, a text area component, a form-box component, a selection-box component, a chart component, a table-view component, and/or a table-view-for-time-series component. The components may be

predefined and stored in a repository for later use. Further, application screens may be designed using these components as screen building blocks.

[0030] In Figure 3, an exemplary composition of a user interface application screen is shown. In a browser window 20, the user interface or UI is composed of a navigation tree 21 and an application screen-frame 22. The application screen-frame 22 is composed of a first toolbar component 23, a second toolbar component 24, a selection-box component 25, a form-box component 26, and a table-view-for-time-series 27. The application screen further includes a title bar, which is set on top of it.

[0031] Consistent with an embodiment of the invention, the framework may further provide a set of database tables where the layout settings and the components properties are stored. Figure 4 shows a screen shot of an exemplary transaction defining screen layout. A set of transactions is used to build the screen by changing the settings and properties stored in the database tables and to establish a relationship to the business data or other data that have to be contained by respective components. Figure 5 shows a screen shot of exemplary transaction defining methods in specialized classes.

[0032] Establishing the relationship between screen components and business data or other data includes generating the required specialized classes by inheriting from super-classes provided by the user interface framework. The user interface framework may provide all the basic characteristics for the correct communication to the scripting language used, which may be BSP, etc., plus all additional features provided by the user interface framework itself. There may be a group of components that do not require this inheriting process, as they may not contain business data and may only require predefined content. These components may include the tray component, the tab-strip component, selection-box component

and/or the toolbar component. Usually, their content is subject to configuration only. Other components require the inheriting process, as they do contain business data and/or other types of data. These components may include the table-view component, the table-view-for-time-series component, the form-box component, and/or the chart component.

[0033] Figure 6 shows a class diagram of an exemplary UI framework. The class diagram 29 shows the relationship between an application 30 and its constituents 31-36. Every application 30 may include a navigation menu 31 and at least one screen-frame 32 containing one or more GUI components 33. In one embodiment, two different classes of GUI components may be provided: one that requires specialization 34 and one that does not require specialization 35. Also, every application 30 may include at least one application model 36. Each application model 36 may provide a set of different application models 37-40 for different applications and backend systems 41.

[0034] Specializing a required class by inheriting allows creating objects that have the properties of the super-class provided by the framework, and additionally contain the event-handlers required to elaborate the data as a result of a user activity.

[0035] For example, in an application screen layout with at least a toolbar component including a SAVE-button and a table-view component containing user editable business data, selecting and clicking the SAVE-button may be required to start the process of saving the user changes in the business data into the respective backend database of the business application.

[0036] The set of database tables of the UI framework may define that, when the SAVE-button is pressed, an event SAVETODATABASE has to be propagated to

the table-view component. The table-view component may perform a particular action or method with a particular name defined by the application developer, when the event SAVETODATABASE has been received. The component may be an object of a class created by the application developer and perform actions programmed by the application developer. The table-view component may include internal attributes that represent the business data in a GUI-like format. The format of the attributes can vary with the component, but usually is a simple structure. After the action has been performed, all the components present in the visible screen may be called and the page rendered accordingly.

[0037] Therefore, there is no need to have detailed knowledge about the underlying scripting language used to create the HTML page output. It is only required to have knowledge about the structure and where to put the data in every particular component. The layout is configured separately. The merging of the business data and layout data is done within the UI framework.

[0038] Referring now again to Figures 4 and 5 and returning to the above-described example, the following is an exemplary process that can be performed for a component based-application:

- Model the screen-frames and name them. Choose one name or ID for the application APPID.
- Choose the IDs for the screen-frames SCRID and the IDs for the classes, which will contain business data APPDATAID.
- Create the specialized classes for the application, for the application model, and for the components requiring specialization by inheritance.
- Set the application specialized classes.
- Set the model specialized classes.
- Assign the application model object (APPDATAID) to its application ID (APPID).
- Set the components specialized classes.
- Set the screen layout.
- Assign the application model object to the GUI components.
- Define all possible fieldnames (e.g., location, product, etc.).

- Configure the components.
- Define the event propagation.

[0039] The UI framework may also support pattern-based screens and/or mixed pattern-components screens. The procedure for creating a pattern may be similar to the one used for creating a component-based screen and can be performed by any application developer. There is no need of a pattern developer profile.

[0040] The UI framework, consistent with embodiments of the invention, can provide high flexibility and allow any application developer to use, create, and change patterns, and generate screens accordingly. Both free-style and pattern-based user interfaces are supported.

[0041] There is no knowledge required regarding the scripting language used, for example, BSP, JSP, ASP, etc. The reutilization of written code is maximized. The separation of application data and user interface (UI) can be achieved by usage of a Model-View –Controller paradigm, a common criterion followed in the software design community. Under this assumption it is always possible to switch from one user interface to another one, maintaining the application logic intact.

[0042] A frequent problem in connection with software products is the code responsibility. In the event of customers reporting bugs, it is very important to quickly identify the responsible developer. Thus, the response time required for the correction can be minimized and the whole maintenance process can be simplified. As a matter of fact, better code and smarter software architectures can signify for remarkable savings in a long-term horizon. Embodiments of the present invention

may be implemented bearing this in mind in order to separate the responsibilities of application developers from the responsibilities of UI framework developers.

[0043] Moreover, embodiments of the invention may allow a user to change the layout settings at runtime, and to store those changes. Therefore, so-called personalization may be achieved. That is, the capability to change the properties of layout elements (color, element position, default page, etc.) according to the user's preference at runtime and retrieving the web page in that state at the next session logon. For instance, the order of the columns in a table-view can be changed according to the planning practice of a particular procurement department.

[0044] A number of embodiments of the invention have been disclosed. Nevertheless, it will be understood that various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims.

[0045] Furthermore, other embodiments of the invention, including modifications and adaptations of the disclosed embodiments, will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the embodiments of the invention disclosed herein. Additionally, although aspects of the present invention are described for being stored in memory, one skilled in the art will appreciate that these aspects can also be stored on other types of computer-readable media, such as secondary storage devices, the Internet or other propagation medium; and/or other forms of RAM or ROM. Therefore, it is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims.